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STATE FOR SA/INS  
NSC FOR DORMANDY  
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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [CE](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: COALITION PARTNER BOYCOTTS  
RECONSTRUCTION DEBATE

Classified By: DCM JAMES F. ENTWISTLE. REASON: 1.4 (B,D).

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SUMMARY  
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[1](#)1. (C) Relegated to an undesirable back seat in post-tsunami reconstruction, Government coalition partner Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) demonstrated its displeasure by boycotting the February 9 Parliamentary debate on reconstruction plans and threatening to resign from the Cabinet. The JVP cited the lack of multipartisan participation in key decisions and the potential for the insurgent Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to benefit politically from reconstruction as justification for the boycott. The likelier rationale, however, appears somewhat more politically self-interested: concern that the Government's Sri Lanka Freedom Party will reap all the credit for post-disaster largesse in the JVP's southern constituency. This JVP maneuver is just the latest in a series of attempted end runs around the Government that makes the party look less like a coalition partner and more like an opposition operative. End summary.

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JVP PEEVED AT BACK-SEAT STATUS;  
STAYS HOME FROM PARLIAMENT  
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[1](#)2. (U) The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), the Government's contentious coalition partner, boycotted the February 9 Parliamentary debate on tsunami reconstruction. The JVP leadership cited dissatisfaction with the minor role the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) has assigned it in reconstruction planning as the reason for their absence. The JVP was the only no-show at the lively debate. Even MPs from the pro-Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) Tamil National Alliance (TNA), who have consistently accused the GSL of short-changing Tamil areas in the distribution of aid, took part.

[1](#)3. (C) Vijitha Herath, the JVP Minister of Culture and National Heritage, complained to us that President Chandrika Kumaratunga was ignoring his party's recommendations to develop a multipartisan consultative mechanism to inform the reconstruction process. Instead, he charged, she had appointed Ministers and party members--some of whom are not even MPs--from her own Sri Lankan Freedom Party (SLFP) to all decision-making positions. Not a single JVP Minister or MP occupied any key position, Herath said, even though many represent tsunami-affected districts. He accused the President and other SLFP leaders of using the well-funded reconstruction process to serve their own personal and political agendas. When asked why JVP leaders deemed it better to boycott the debate than to argue their concerns before Parliament, Herath responded that people might mistakenly assume, since the JVP is part of the government, that it endorses GSL reconstruction plans. Because the JVP had not been consulted in any of the important decisions, "we can't take responsibility"--or blame--for how the process unfolds, he emphasized. By not taking part in the debate, the party hoped to make that distinction clear to the general public, he indicated.

[1](#)4. (C) The JVP's treatment is particularly unfair in light of its energetic efforts to help those affected by the tsunami, Herath asserted, adding that the party has raised

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nearly \$12 million on its own at home and abroad. This aid is being distributed to all affected communities, he continued. The LTTE fears that JVP philanthropic activities in the east will increase the party's popularity there, especially among Tamils, Herath claimed, and has thus fabricated stories about the JVP hijacking aid intended for Tamil communities. (Note: Jayantha Wijesekera, the Tamil-speaking, rabble-rousing JVP MP for Trincomalee, told us that the LTTE is particularly concerned about his appeal and has thus threatened him on several occasions.) When asked how the JVP viewed potential GSL/LTTE cooperation on

tsunami relief, Herath repeated the standard JVP line:

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Cooperation is all right in principle as long as the Tigers do not take advantage of it--which, of course, he implied, they will.

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SLFP: JVP FEARS BEING "SIDELINED"  
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15. (C) According to Maithripala Sirisena, SLFP General Secretary, Leader of the House and Minister of River Basin

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Development, however, the JVP has been fully consulted--if not placed in positions of actual leadership or decision-making authority--at every turn. The JVP is just not cooperative, he charged, adding that at the local level even the LTTE is more cooperative than the troublesome GSL coalition partner. Complaints that disaster aid is not being distributed equitably are utterly invalid, he stated. JVP threats to resign their Cabinet portfolios are mere posturing, he said confidently, attributable to a fear of being "sidelined" in the reconstruction process. The President seems to share Sirisena's confidence that the JVP is just bluffing. Reacting angrily to a press query on the topic at a public gathering in Gampaha District on February 13, Kumaratunga reportedly dared her coalition partner to act on its oft-repeated threat to quit the government, responding, "They can leave if they wish."

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COMMENT  
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16. (C) The JVP has threatened to quit the government numerous times since joining the coalition after Parliamentary elections in April over a variety of issues--from privatization to water management to labor union disputes to the peace process. Reconstruction is only the most recent bone of contention--but it is also the one with potentially the highest stakes. The JVP's southern Sinhalese stronghold suffered some of the worst damage wrought by the December 26 disaster, and the party has been particularly active in organizing and distributing relief. For southern voters, the allocation of aid resources likely trumps concerns about the peace process--which the JVP had manipulated to lure away Sinhalese support for the SLFP--as the issue nearest their hearts. But the south is an important vote bank for the SLFP as well, and the party is unlikely to cede the lead in reconstruction in the Sinhalese heartland to its fractious coalition partner. Before the tsunami struck, the President cited the need to retain

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crucial JVP support as a major obstacle to resuming negotiations with the Tigers. The outpouring of sympathy and assistance for the GSL, both from at home and abroad, since December 26 seems to have allayed some of the President's earlier concerns about upsetting her coalition partner. Regardless of SLFP claims to include the JVP in reconstruction planning, it seems clear that the President has decided that this partnership will not include sharing positions of leadership--and the ability to dole out resources--with the junior member.

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